



Amesbury Technical Review Committee
January 22, 2025

Virtual Meeting
9:30 am

In attendance: Jim Wilson, Nick Cracknell, Joe Buckley, Howard Snyder, Amanda Armington, Chief Bailey, Nipun Jain, Lisa DeMeo, and Lauren Blatchford, and Becky Frey

Absent: Chief Nolan, Robert Serino

Chief Bailey called the meeting to order at 9:34 am

Application Review:

1. Meadowbrook Solar Project – [Site Plan](#) and [Special Permit](#)

Sarah Hussain and Jesse O'Donnell were present to speak to the application. Sarah Hussain commented that they submitted a permit application for the Meadowbrook project and have been moving forward with the permit process.

Jesse O'Donnell commented that he is the engineer on the project from Weston and Sampson. The existing conditions plan is color coded. The blue outline is the continuous lots of land the owner has, and they are focusing on the right half. Meadowbrook Pond is to the north and Lake Attitash is to the southeast. There are a few pockets of wetlands delineated in pink on the plan. They show the buffers around them as well. The green on the plan shows the already cleared area. The center of the site has two small knolls. There is a residential neighborhood to the southeast. The proposed limit of work for the solar array will be 42 acres in size. The pink shows where the equipment pads will be located. There are proposed utility poles at the edge of the site, and there will be overhead wires to the first equipment pad. After that they will be underground wires. There are three equipment pad areas on the site, and they will be enclosed with chain-link fence. The central utility pad will have a turnaround. The gravel driveway will run through the middle of the site. The final equipment pad has a turnaround area that could accommodate fire truck. The green areas show the 4 proposed infiltration pads on the site. As a water falls on the site it would be guided to one of the 4 basins designed under local and DEP storm water standards. The pretreatment features include a meadow strip, rip rap, a vegetated swale, stone check dams, and sediment forebay. The only proposed grading is reserved for the storm water basins and the road. They are not planning to do any other earthwork on the site. They will be clearing the site for the array but no other earthwork. The array will be fully enclosed by a chain link fence.

Nick Cracknell questioned what the plan was for the improvements around the cart path on the northwest side of the site near the air strip. Jesse O'Donnell responded that right



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now it is just a gravel driveway that extends toward the edge of the property. They are still working out what vehicles will be entering the site and where. Nick Cracknell responded that it was important to understand why they were going to that length for those improvements. It was our understanding that they would be using Kimball Rd. for a construction access. Right now, it stops before getting to Kimball Rd. most likely because it will have to cross a wetland to get there. Nick Cracknell suggested that they figure out what the plan for that cart path was and show it on the plan clearly. The air strip would be altered in a damaging way if they do those improvements. If they are not going all the way to the paved section, then they should remove it from the project. Or at least remove the improvements from the air strip because that is very stable and should be preserved.

Nipun Jain plan commented that the plan shows it as a primary access road which is confusing. They are indicating two primary access points. Jesse O'Donnell commented that they would look at that and will clarify the access. Nipun Jain commented that section XI.S. of the Zoning Bylaw requires that they outline the means and methods for bringing in equipment, solar panels, and infrastructure for installation. They should have an information package that shows the vehicle and equipment details and access.

Nick Cracknell commented that they encourage the applicants look at reducing the limit of work for the primary access off Birchmeadow Rd. Right now, it is a 50-foot limit of work just to build a 20-foot-wide utility driveway. That limit of work should be as thin as possible. The utility wires should be underground starting at Birchmeadow Rd. That would help reduce the limit of work. The Fire Department would be satisfied with a 16-foot drivable roadway with 2-foot shoulders on either side. It is a cost saving measure to you to reduce the limit of work.

Chief Bailey noted that Lisa DeMeo had to leave at 10 am and asked if she had any questions.

Lisa DeMeo commented that Birchmeadow Rd. was not an accepted city street. That may have implications to the project. The northern access does not go out to the street. Right now, it is all the same ownership, but that could be problematic if that changes. At a minimum there should be an easement that goes with the deed.

Lisa DeMeo commented that Fire could use that as a second means of access.

Nick Cracknell commented that the development team needs to figure that access out because it may be a want more than a need.



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Nick Cracknell commented that the proposed access utility driveway interfaces with Brookside Lane. It is important to drill down and see how they relate to one another until get to where they merge.

Lisa DeMeo noted that Brookside Lane is not a street at all. Nick Cracknell commented they were aware of that. It is important to understand how that access way interfaces with this one.

Joe Buckley questioned if the access road was entirely on land owned by the developer. Nick Cracknell commented that they had the 5-acre property under agreement. There were 3 parcels associated with this project. The first is a 15-acre parcel with the air strip, then a 50-acre parcel, and the last parcel is the Nihan property. That is a 5-acre parcel and will provide access for the utility driveway. Sarah Hussain confirmed that was correct.

Joe Buckley questioned who would own the utility lines ultimately. Sarah Hussain responded that she was not 100% sure. It is likely the first half would be owned by National Grid and then past the Vynorious property would be Syncarpha. Joe Buckley commented that National Grid will need formal recorded easements. Sarah Hussain confirmed that was correct. They designed the width of the road based on National Grid requirements. Nipun Jain questioned if they asked for the 50-foot right of way. Sarah Hussain responded that they asked for a driveway 16-20 feet. Nick Cracknell commented that they are proposing a 50-foot limit of work. It is hard to imagine that National Grid would want more than a fire department.

Joe Buckley commented that National Grid may consider this transmission and may have specific standards on that. Nick Cracknell commented that should be clarified to help parse the wants from the needs. Sarah Hussain confirmed they would follow up. Joe Buckley commented that if National Grid using a specific standard, please list what that is.

Joe Buckley questioned if the plan set had a profile. Jesse O'Donnell responded that it did not. Joe Buckley questioned if they were proposing any excessive grading anywhere. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they were only grading in certain areas like the driveway and storm water areas.

Nick Cracknell commented that this proposal was in the water resource protection district and questioned if they modified the storm water basin to be out of the 400 buffer. Jesse O'Donnell responded that it was still in the buffer. Nick Cracknell commented that they should move the storm water basin out of the 400-foot buffer.



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Nick Cracknell questioned if they delineated all the wetland on the property with the local Conservation Commission. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they have not applied to get an ORAD from the Conservation Commission. Nick Cracknell commented that they should file that. Nick Cracknell questioned if the access driveway was out of the buffer. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they were outside the buffer.

Nick Cracknell commented that when the 40B project was happening there was a potential vernal pool near the access driveway and questioned if that still existed. Jesse O'Donnell responded that he did not recall any mention of that. Nick Cracknell commented that he should consult with their wetland scientist on that.

Joe Buckley questioned if they had any soil data because this site was adjacent to Amesbury's water supply in Meadowbrook Pond and Lake Attitash. If there was a lot of clay it could damage the water supply. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they did test pits in the storm basin areas. It was mostly sand down to 3 feet and that was the general trend for all 4-5 test pits. He will look through the test pit logs and talk to their soil expert. Joe Buckley responded that he was glad to see test pits were taken and questioned if the locations were shown. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they were on the existing conditions plan. The soil log data and summary are included in the storm water report.

Nipun Jain commented that the limit of disturbance was proposed to be 42-44 acres and he questioned how many test pits they did. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they did 4 test pits in the storm water basins areas. Nipun Jain noted those test pits were done for gauging infiltration rates based on the soil conditions where they are proposed. The site is also being cleared in other areas for the solar panels and questioned what the soil condition for those areas were. They do not want to see wash out conditions. The applicants should also look at the conditions in the areas that are being denuded for the panels. That is the area that will be tightly spaced, and it will be harder to address if there was ever an issue. That should be part of the storm water management anyway.

Nipun Jain questioned what they were planning to do with the tree stumps. Jesse O'Donnell questioned if he was suggesting they do additional test pits central to the array areas. Nick Cracknell confirmed that was correct. This is a 40-acre limit of work, and they should get more data on the soil. Nipun Jain added that there was some steep grading proposed along the abutting property. They need to establish soil conditions there.

Nick Cracknell commented that the 40 acres of clearing came up at the Planning Board in their completeness check. Under normal circumstances an applicant is required to



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identify all trees over an 8-inch caliper in the limit of work. They need to come to some kind of understanding on how to characterize what is on the ground for the limit of work if they are expecting to remove it all. Nick Cracknell questioned if they were planning to remove the stumps and stockpile the earth to respread after the array was installed. Jesse O'Donnell confirmed that was the general plan. They will be clear cutting the trees and grinding most stumps. Nick Cracknell clarified that they would be pulling the stumps out of the ground and chipping them for reuse. They need a clear understanding of what is actually being done here. Jesse O'Donnell confirmed that was how he understood it. Sarah Hussain added that she would confirm with their construction team.

Nick Cracknell commented that it was important to understand the soils in the limit of work. They need to establish a reasonable way to characterize what's in the 40-acre limit of work. At the end of the day, they are reviewing this solar facility against the site plan review, solar energy, and water resource protection sections of the ordinance. The goal is to mitigate adverse impact to health and safety. They need to ensure the mitigation measures adequately mitigate the adverse impact. It is important to understand what is actually being cut for the access road and solar farm. They should delineate the limit of work better in the field. It is challenging to understand where we are on the site based on how it was staked. They should delineate the access road and limit of work so planning board can do a site walk when the weather turns. Jesse O'Donnell confirmed they would work on that. Nick Cracknell commented that they would collaborate on that. It may be warranted to do some sort of ecological assessment of the 40 acres. That would look at the flora and fauna and the impact on the adverse impacts. Staff can help with the scope of that to have you hire a company do that. The Planning Board is going to have peer review do the report or review one. Jesse O'Donnell commented that he would update staff when they had an outfit that can do that work and then work with staff on a scope.

Howard Snyder questioned what the management plan for facility was once it was constructed. Will they use chemical or mechanical tactics to maintain the grass area to keep invasives or plant material at proper levels? Jesse O'Donnell responded that they included a seed mix in their proposal. They will allow it to grow to an extent. It will not be kept like a residential lawn. The plan is to have some sort of maintenance, but they are happy to work with the Board on that. Howard Snyder commented that it sounded like they were laying down a wildflower seed mix with the idea of intermittent mowing. National Grid lets it grow for 15 years then clear cuts the area and puts chemical down. It would be better to do the seed mix and occasional mowing. Sarah Hussain commented that she would verify the procedure with the asset management team.



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Nick Cracknell commented they should consider an agricultural use for maintenance. They could easily have a goat farm here keeping the grass down and fertilizing the space. The landowners have a shop in town selling natural products. They could evaluate how many animals the site could accommodate without adverse impact. Howard Snyder commented that goat would reduce maintenance costs and potentially introduce a revenue stream if they lease the space for livestock. Sarah Hussain responded that they would need to consult the asset management team. They have not done that maintenance tactic on any projects to date.

Nipun Jain reminded the applicant team the part of the extensive review is because this is in the water resource protection district. The impact on ecological habitat by clear cutting is not the same as other site development on brownfields that have been previously cleared. There is a difference between this site and other sites. The applicants will need to do extra work to show what they have done in relation to the water resource protection. They need to be mindful of that additional lens.

Nick Cracknell commented that surrounding these 42 acres with a chain-link fence is not very exciting. It may make sense if they have a livestock use inside but if not then they need to make sure they look at how wildlife will move through the site. It is hard to believe there is only one way to fence a site. There must be ways to design a fence to meet security requirements without having to be a chain-link fence. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they would look into the regulation constraints.

Nipun Jain questioned if the two knolls on the site would be altered in terms of finished grades. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they were mostly skirting around the first knoll and the second would be a 3 to 1 slope. That is the industry standard. Nick Cracknell questioned if each pad was supporting about 100 feet of panels and if they were stepping down the slope. Jesse O'Donnell responded that each table has 20 panels. Each panel has 2 posts toward edge of table to support the table. The Syncarpha team looks to place the posts based on sun and grade. The panels would be stepped down. Nick Cracknell questioned if they had taken shadows into account. Jesse O'Donnell responded that this was a preliminary design. They will have electrical engineering and solar sighting to confirm locations. Nick Cracknell responded that they need to really understand how the panels are situated on the terrain and will want to see how long columns are everywhere. They should include a cross section and photo simulations on how it will look stepping into the grade. The southern edge of the solar field is next to Birchmeadow Rd. There are homes at the bottom believe they will be adversely impacted from the project. The applicants need to show what they are doing at the property line and any buffer impacts. They need to understand what it will look like from



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the property line up and look at buffers and solar glare. The abutter to the north of the air strip should be considered as well.

Nipun Jain questioned how they intended to create an undisturbed buffer given the grading work they are doing along abutting properties. They need to look at how they will address the visual impact based on abutting properties. Nick Cracknell added the setback was outlined in section XI.S. subsection 5 and X.E. There is the ability to seek waivers or substitute a mitigation measure. The default position is that it should not be there so the development team needs to ask permission to be there. The burden is on the development team to prove there is no viable alternative and then engage in mitigation measures.

Jesse O'Donnell commented that they could include a wood stockade fence along the buffer. Nick Cracknell commented that it was important to understand the cross section between the house, knolls, and the areas they are disturbing. They need to understand if the mitigation they are proposing is adequate.

Nick Cracknell questioned why the battery storage pads were located at the top of the hills where they are more visible. Jesse O'Donnell responded that they wanted them to be close to the driveway and as far away from the resource areas as possible to give the longest distance of meadow strip. Nick Cracknell commented that may not be the best location for them visually. Joe Buckley noted they needed to be close to the road. Nick Cracknell agreed but also noted they did not need to be at the top of the hill. Jesse O'Donnell commented that they were also sited there to limit earthwork. Nick Cracknell commented that there was a flat area near the northern edge of the air strip. There are competing objectives, and they should evaluate if that is the right spot for them. Jesse O'Donnell confirmed they would look at it.

Nick Cracknell commented that the Planning Board public hearing was scheduled for February 10, 2025, and that is where the formal application presentation will happen. They also will plan to have a peer reviewers list for that meeting. The fire department has expressed concerns on battery storage facilities, and so they will be requesting a peer reviewer for that as well. It is our responsibility as staff to review the plans and submit a first round of comments to the Planning Board before the hearing on the 10th. The development team should expect to get more feedback from TRC and should expect to come back and do this again. This is the applicant's opportunity to talk to city staff about the particulars and performance standards. This will probably be back here after the public hearing. Nipun Jain noted that if they seek feedback from a specific department, then they should distribute that to the other departments to keep everyone on the same page.



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Chief Bailey asked if the applicant had any questions.

Sarah Hussain questioned if they would come back to another meeting here. Chief Bailey commented that they will receive comments from TRC in a list format. They will receive it prior to the Planning Board Meeting. Nick Cracknell noted that it is likely given the complexities of this project that they will come back to TRC to address comments. TRC is here to help facilitate a conversation about the science not the politics. Chief Bailey added that it gives the applicant direct access to all the subject matter experts in the town, so it is a one stop shop to talk to everyone. This is your opportunity to work through the project's red flags with TRC. Nipun Jain added that when they have peer reviewers providing further comments, the applicant will most likely want to work with staff to resolve the comments. This is the opportunity to work at one venue instead of individual sources.

Administrative:

1. Minutes 12-18-24 and 1-8-25

The draft minutes were not ready for review.

The meeting adjourned at 11:17 am.